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History Essay

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### Abstract

Throughout our nation's history, there have been many conflicts and wars that should have taught us valuable lessons. In many instances our failure to learn from the past has cost lives. A working knowledge of history will not always give us the answer but it may help us to ask the questions we need to ask. For example O.I.F. what to do once you have taken over and occupied the country? How do you police the country? What's the plan for getting electricity back? There are many things we should have thought of. The American Revolution and Vietnam are just some examples of wars and conflicts we could have learned from.

A better understanding of the past can help us to win the wars of today. Looking back through our wars and conflicts will not always give us the answers but it will provide the questions we should ask. One of the main reasons for this essay is to promote historical mindedness because “Those who do not know history are doomed to repeat it”<sup>1</sup>.

Military professionals who study and know history can save lives because they will know the questions to ask, for example what do the people in the country that we occupy want and need, safe and secure environment, mutual trust, power, clean water etc... All too often the United States has not taken the needs into consideration of the occupied nation. Most recently during O.I.F the Iraqi people suffered greatly from the United States lack of planning, during the spring of 2003 we invaded and within a very short time we found ourselves victorious over an enemy once again and almost as soon as we took Baghdad the people were looting and the innocent were suffering due to our lack of planning. There was not clean water, a police force, electricity and definitely not a mutual trust due to the fact no one knew who the enemy was for a time. If we have looked back we would have seen the need for prior planning.

In today's army, starting with initial entry training and at unit level, cultural awareness is a priority, if the army had trained more before we invaded we would have had a much easier time dealing with the people we encountered. Cultural awareness is one more thing we should have planned for and this is one lesson we have known about since WWI many times members of the uniformed services who were the sons and daughters of immigrants were used to speak to the native population. For example German, French, Japanese, Polish, having personnel who speak the language was one of the tremendous benefits. No one thought of even giving basic language training until after the Iraq war was well underway.

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<sup>1</sup> (George Santayana 1863-1952)

We used the Indians during WWII to help when our radio transmissions were being intercepted we used the Cherokee, Choctaw and Navaho languages to confound our enemy. We definitely learned early on that cultural awareness will play a key role in securing a lasting peace and ultimate victory. Having a better understanding of the indigenous people and a basic knowledge of the language can help us in using non-combatants as part of the intelligence preparation of the battlefield. “Any effort to develop cultural awareness must address regional history, religious and political factions, geography infrastructure, customs and the local economy.”<sup>2</sup>. Knowing body language is also a part of cultural awareness training we should have thought about. We knew none of that and in my opinion went into Iraq blind on many aspects. Now however the deployment training the soldier receives is adequate, it goes a long way in preparing a soldier for what they encounter. This knowledge of knowing that we need to teach soldiers about cultural awareness will go along way with the new environments and new allies and new enemies we will face in the future. Does culture matter? “The most serious intellectual deficit that plagued the American presence in Iraq and a critical reason, for our repeated failure to predict Iraqis behavior has been insufficient awareness of the conflicting perspectives of Iraqis from different back grounds and communities.”<sup>3</sup>.

A look back at the American Revolution (1754-1781) would have taught us many things, one thing that occupation of a country rarely if ever works. The British did not establish trust with the locals; economically they were hurting us with taxes. The Tea Act (1773) was just one example, of the unfair treatment the British were trying to impose. In many ways the American Revolution can be compared to our present day war in Iraq, a super power operating in a hostile

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<sup>2</sup> (Major General Walter Wojdakowski Infantry Magazine June 2008)

<sup>3</sup> (Noah Feldman, Senior Agent Fellow at the council on foreign relations 30 June 2006 H104 History lesson disc)

terrain, soldiers not really knowing what they're going up against. A conventional army fighting against the locals, also after time the locals had formed a much different opinion of the British soldiers once the British were whipping the colonists for minor infractions, also the British thought of themselves as being better than the colonists, not as equals. It is almost exactly like the Iraq War in many aspects. The Abu Gharabib prison incident set the United States back a lot when dealing with winning the hearts and minds of the Iraqis. There are many more examples of acts the British did to destroy the relationship with the settlers, Sugar Act 1764, Stamp Act in 1765, and the Boston Massacre. Each time the Army accidentally kills a civilian on purpose or not it takes us back. The American Revolution goes a long way in giving us vital lessons. The British lost however it drove the United States to make the Declaration of Independence and to form a government that has been successful and we can only hope that we push Iraq into a similar situation. Another war we can learn from is the Civil War. Some of the things we can learn are the way media can play a part in the war. The Civil War was the first time photos of the war could be shown and of course can make a tremendous difference in the hearts and minds of the nation. The Civil War, Tet Offensive of 1968 and Mogadishu 1993 represent 3 points in time where American troops won on the battlefield yet found themselves losing public opinion and support. This war can also help us to understand the military's role in affecting social, political, economical and cultural ways. During the Civil War the North's main cause was to stop slavery and make a change in the status of African Americans. The North failed due to the fact there was prejudice in the north, a lot like Kurd, Shia, Sunni the simple fact is us being here trying to help them, does not help because the people of Iraq do not want the help, they are prejudice against each other and the military cannot change that. In many ways the United States Army has learned if we look at the facts and breakdown the statistics we have improved greatly.

The number of deaths in the war has been far less than most. According to data, “American way and military operations casualties”<sup>4</sup>. During Vietnam the army lost 30,957, during O.I.F the army lost 2,891 through 5 April 2008.

Our Technology improves constantly in Iraq each vehicle is equipped with the C.R.E.W. system (Counter Electronic Warfare Devices) with the duke and the warlock variants, which have significantly cut down on our soldiers dying from I.E.D’s (Improvised explosive Devices). The MRAP (Mine-Resistant Ambush Protected Vehicle) the newest vehicle that we own it also is saving lives so we learn everyday and develop technology constantly. The learning never stops, the TTP’s (Techniques Tactics and Procedures) used today are from learning from our past mistakes. However this is not the first time I.E.D.’s have been used for example in Bosnia, Vietnam just to mention a few instead of learning after the incident happens we should be looking and planning prior to them happening. Now the army has the ability to prevent soldiers from dying from I.E.D’s. The next war or conflict we, will know how effective that I.E.D.’s are and from the T.T.P’s we learned the army will save lives. Now the key is to teach and mentor the soldiers of the future to ensure our mistakes are never repeated from all of our previous wars.

We now place a significant emphasis on training, leading and mentoring the Afghan and Iraqi soldiers and police so that we may leave these country’s better then we found them, just one example is the personnel who come to Iraq and Afghanistan to train their army and police, for example Dr. (SGM Retired) Terry Tucker served 23 years on active duty, and served as a trainer to the Saudi Arabian National Guard and two years as a trainer in Afghanistan. He is currently a Department of Defense contractor in Afghanistan on a mobile training team that teaches the

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<sup>4</sup> (Published in the Congressional Research source, Library of Congress Published date 2007 by Fischer Hannah)

Afghan Army and police a variety of classes as mentioned in the (May-June 2008 Infantry magazine). We have learned in order its do our job properly we must leave the country better than we found it.

In conclusion there will always be a great need for better understanding of the past so that it can help to win the wars of today and even if history does not give us all we need to win, it will give us the right questions to ask which will save lives.



### References

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- 2) History Lessons Disc H101A (George Santayana 1863-1952)
- 3) History Lessons Disc H104 (Noah Feldman, 30 June 2006)
- 4) Infantry Magazine (Walter Wojdakowski June 2008)

Bibliography

- 1) George Santayana 1863-1952, H101A History Lessons Disc
- 2) General Walter Wojdakowski June2008 “Infantry Magazine”
- 3) Noah Feldman, 30 June 2006 H104 History Lessons Disc
- 4) Hanna Fisher, 5 May 2007 Library of Congress

- I. A better understanding of the past can help us to win the wars of today.
- II. How studying history can save lives.
  - A. Why military professionals need to study.
  - B. Conflicts we should have learned from, American Revolution, Civil war, Vietnam the start of O.I.F.
  - C. Creating a safe and secure environment, the way to maintain your victory.
- III. Winning battles and not winning the war.
  - A. Gain and maintain the locals trust.
  - B. Soldiers and a lack of cultural understanding
  - C. Media on the battlefield, how it effects your success.
- IV. What we should have learned from the past
  - A. The way to win the war is to achieve political, economic and military victory.
  - B. The army does not impose cultural changes.
  - C. History will not give us all we need to win but it will give us the right questions to ask which may help to save lives and ultimately help us to win the war.